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Southeast is a Solid Investment

By Governor Sean Parnell

Unleashing economic opportunity for Alaskans requires close work between the private sector and public sector, including key leaders who will visit Ketchikan this week for Southeast Conference.

This vital collaboration produces jobs, healthy communities, and a strong business climate that encourages investment.

In this year's capital budget, I approved funding for projects designed to bring down energy costs that far outstrip national averages. These projects will put Southeast residents to work. Important energy projects for Southeast include: Sitka's Blue Lake, Ketchikan's Whitman Lake, Reynolds Creek near Prince of Wales Island, and projects in Pelican, Elfin Cove, Metlakatla, Hoonah, and Tenakee.

The Alaska Energy Authority is working with Southeast Conference to produce an Integrated Resource Plan, a 50-year outlook designed to be a foundation for regional energy development. Lower energy costs will enable communities to support new and existing businesses, as well as strengthen key industries in Southeast, including commercial fishing and tourism.

Schools can utilize their energy savings for classroom instruction: books, teachers, supplies, and equipment.

Families will not have to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table during winter's coldest and wettest days.

Our commitment creates opportunity for other industries as well. Last week, I signed into law a bill nearly doubling the size of the Southeast State Forest to about 48,500 acres.

This charges the Division of Forestry with land management that will boost the region's long-term timber supply and restore logging jobs to serve mills with harvesting and thinning.

With the help of Haines Rep. Bill Thomas and Wrangell Rep. Peggy Wilson, the Southeast State Forest bill – HB 105 – received unanimous support from lawmakers during the last legislative session.

We're just getting started.

Alaska Ship and Drydock is a key part of the industrial base in Southeast. We're clearing the way for Ketchikan's shipyard to have a meaningful shot at building the Alaska Class Ferry.

Looking ahead, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development Commissioner Susan Bell is working with the Legislature to create revolving loan funds for mariculture and charter fishing industries. These funds are crucial for our small businesses to compete in global markets and ensure that valuable fishing permits remain in the hands of Alaska captains.

Our bill, HB 121, passed the House unanimously and is now under review by the Senate Finance Committee.

This commitment to business attracts international companies that regard Southeast as a solid place for sound investment.

Vancouver-based Heatherdale Resources Ltd. recently increased its stake in the Niblack gold, copper, zinc, and silver mining project on Prince of Wales to 60 percent. Another Canadian company, Ucore Rare Metals, considers the Bokan Mountain rare earth mine its signature project.

These companies employ Southeast residents whose dollars support local businesses, schools, and community organizations.

While we've been aggressively working to put the building blocks in place to grow Alaska's economy, we're also proactive in preserving the next generation's future.

For these reasons, we're bullish on Southeast Alaska. For Southeast Alaska's families, we're in this together for the long haul.